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PETTICOAT GOVERNMENT.

BY MAX O'RELL.

WITH COMMENTS BY MRS. H. P. SPOFFORD AND MRS. MARGARET
BOTTOME, PRESIDENT OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER OF
KING'S DAUGHTERS AND SONS.

I.

I LOATHE the domination of woman, but I ever crave for her influence, and I believe that any man of refinement and thinking, that any lover and admirer of woman, will echo this sentiment.

I know of one country only where the government by woman was given a real trial, and that is New Zealand. The law was passed and the experiment was made. The law had to be repealed after six months. The government had taken such a tyrannical form that that loveliest of spots on the earth was on the eve of a revolution, of a desperate struggle for liberty.

Things were pretty badly managed in a small Ohio city when I was visiting it four years ago. The following year women put up their names as candidates for the City Council in every ward and were all returned. They did manage the city. The following year the experiment had been made, and not one woman was returned again.

The American men are so busy, so long absent from home, that many of their womankind have to find out a way of using the leisure time left at their disposal, with results that are not always altogether satisfactory. Some devote that time to literature, to the improvement of their brilliant native intellect ; some spend it in frivolities ; some indulge in all the fads of Anglo-Saxon life.

The women of good society in America are what they are

everywhere else, satisfied with their lot which consists in being the adored goddesses of refined households ; but there exists in this country, among the middle—perhaps what I should call in European parlance, lower-middle—classes, restless, bumptious, ever poking-their-noses-everywhere women who are slowly, but surely and safely, transforming this great land of liberty into a land of petty, fussy tyranny, and trying, often with complete success, to impose on the community fads of every shape and form.

If there is one country in the world where the women appear, in the eyes of the foreign visitor, to enjoy all manner of privileges and to have the men in leading strings, that country is America. You would imagine, therefore, that America should be the last country where the “new woman” was to be found airing her grievances. Yet she is flourishing throughout the length and breadth of this huge continent. She is petted by her husband, the most devoted and hard-working of husbands in the world ; she is literally covered with precious stones by him. She is allowed to wear hats that would “fetch” Paris in Carnival time, or start a panic at a *Corpus-Christi* procession in Paris or a Lord-Mayor’s Show in London. She is the superior of her husband in education, and almost in every respect. She is surrounded by the most numerous and delicate attentions. Yet she is not satisfied.

The Anglo-Saxon “new woman” is the most ridiculous production of modern times and destined to be the most ghastly failure of the century. She is *par excellence* the woman with a grievance, and self-labelled the greatest nuisance of modern society. The new woman wants to retain all the privileges of her sex and secure, besides, all those of man. She wants to be a man and to remain a woman. She will fail to become a man, but she may succeed in ceasing to be a woman.

And, now, where is that “new woman” to be found ? Put together a hundred women, intelligent and of good society ; take out the beautiful ones, then take out the married ones who are loved by their husbands and their children, and kindly seek the “new woman” among what is left—ugly women, old maids, and disappointed wives.

Woman has no grievance against man. Her only grievance should be, I admit, against Nature, which made her different from man ; with duties different, physically and otherwise,

almost always to her disadvantage. The world exists and marches on through love. I pity from the bottom of my heart the good woman who is not to know the whispers of love of a good husband or the caresses of little children, but I am not prepared to see life become a burden for her sake.

There is no possibility of denying or ignoring the fact. The purpose, the *raison d'être*, of woman is to be a mother, as the *raison d'être* of a fruit tree is to bear fruit. And woe to the next generations; for everybody knows that *only* the children of quiet and reposed women are healthy and intelligent.

The woman question will only be solved by the partnership in life of man and wife, as it exists in France, where, thank God! the "new woman" is unknown; by the equality of the sexes, but each with different, well-defined duties to perform.

The "new woman" is not to be found outside of Great Britain, where woman is her husband's inferior, and of the United States, where she is his superior.

The woman who devotes a good deal of her time to the management of public affairs is a woman who is not required to devote much of it to private ones.

Show me a woman of forty!

Look on this picture: eyes bright, beaming with joy and happiness, complexion clear, rosy, plump, not a wrinkle, mouth smiling. See her lips bearing the imprint of holy kisses, and her neck the mark of her little children's arms. She has no grievance. Ask her to join the "new woman" army. "No, thanks," she will say with a smile of pity, "the old style is good enough for me."

And on this: thin, sallow complexion, eyes without lustre, wrinkled, mouth sulky, haughty, the disgust of life written on every feature. That woman will join the ranks of every organization which aims at taking the cup of love away from the lips of every happy being.

But all this might take the shape of a long digression. Let us see how some American women devote part of the time which they are not probably wanted to devote at home.

I think that of all the grand fads indulged in by some women in America the palm should be given to the compulsory water-drinking work. That is a colossal illustration of what women can do when left entirely to their own resources.

Now, I will lay down as a sort of principle that the "temperance" woman and the teetotaler are not to be found in refined society, and I don't think that in saying so, I shall run the risk of being contradicted. I have often been a guest at the Union Club, the Union League Club, the Manhattan, the Century, the Players, and many other good clubs, I have dined in the best houses of the great American cities, and nowhere have I met teetotalers in those circles of society. Refined, intelligent people of good society, artists, literary men are not teetotalers; that will be granted by everybody. I don't mention politicians, even of the best class, who have at times to be teetotalers to catch votes in a democracy.

The smaller towns of America—and that is America proper—are ruled by fussy, interfering faddists, fanatics of all sorts, old women of both sexes, shrieking cockatoos that will by-and-by make life well-nigh intolerable to any man of self-respect and make him wonder whether he lives in a free country or not.

Take two lively illustrations. A few months ago I was in the town of E. (Kansas). There was a mayor who was married, and the happy pair had a little boy. That little boy was a wicked little boy. One day he was caught smoking a cigarette. Now what should be done by sensible parents to such a wicked little boy? Why, he should be turned over and given a good hearty—you know! This is not at all what was done. The mayor's wife called up a meeting of women, made a violent speech on the pernicious habit of cigarette smoking, and it was decided to petition the mayor and ask him to forbid the sale of cigarettes within the precincts of his jurisdiction. For the sake of peace and happiness at home, the worthy mayor published an edict prohibiting the sale of cigarettes in his district. However, cigarettes can be had in the town of E., but you have to walk nearly a mile, just outside the limits of the mayor's jurisdiction, to find a store where a roaring trade in cigarettes is done. All the same, you must admit that it is a nuisance to be obliged to walk a mile, in a free country, to buy a little article of luxury that you indulge in, without ever abusing it, because there happens to be in the town a wicked little boy that once smoked a cigarette.

When I was in the town of T. (Arkansas), only a few weeks ago, I gave a lecture under the auspices of "temperance" ladies of the city. They called on me.

Being of a rather inquisitive turn of mind, I said to them : "Now, ladies, I understand I am in a prohibition State. How do you account for your existence ? Do you wish now to advocate the suppression of tea, coffee and icewater, which, I must say, would go a long way toward improving the complexion and the digestive apparatus of your fellow-creatures ?"

"No," they said ; "we find that, in spite of the law, there is liquor, wine and beer still sold in this town, and we want to put a stop to it."

I knew that such was the case, for I had, *proh pudor !* a bottle of lager beer in my pocket which I had bought for my dinner, but which, I am glad to say, was not discovered by the ladies under the auspices of whom I was to lecture in the evening. I can do with ice-water, but in a prohibition State I cannot. The evil spirit prompts me. I must have beer or wine with my meals. I have never been drunk in my life ; but if I ever get drunk, it will be in a prohibition State.

"Well," said the lady president of the temperance society of the town of T., "could you believe that, a few days ago, a poor woman of the town and her children actually died of starvation, while every day her husband got drunk with the wages he received?"

"But," I mildly suggested, "you should see that that man was punished, not the innocent population of this town. Don't suppress the wine, which is a gift of God: punish—suppress, even, if you like—the drunkard. It is not wine that makes a man drunk, it is vice. Don't suppress the wine, suppress the vice, or the vicious. Imprison a drunkard, lynch him, hang, shoot him, quarter him, do what you like with him, but allow hundreds of good, wise, temperate people, who would use wine in moderation, to indulge in a habit that makes men moderate, cheerful and happy."

My argument was lost on them.

Every year there are men who use knives to stab fellow-creatures ; but there are millions who use their knives to eat their meals peacefully with. The law punishes the criminals, but would not think of suppressing the knives.

Any law is bad that punishes, injures, or annoys thousands of good, innocent people in order to stop the mischief done by a few—a very few, after all—blackguards and scoundrels.

These Christian ladies left me certainly unconverted, and took their revenge by not paying me my fee after the lecture, which confirmed me in my firm resolution never to have anything to do with angels—this side of the grave.

The Anglo-Saxon should by all means preach temperance, which means moderation, not total abstinence. What they preach overreaches the mark and does no good. When you say that a country enjoys a *temperate* climate, that does not mean that it has no climate at all, but enjoys a moderate one, neither too hot nor too cold.

These same Anglo-Saxons should not despise, but admire and envy, those who can enjoy, like men of understanding, like gentlemen, the glorious gifts of God to man without ever making fools of themselves. For these, the law should be made.

If your husband or son, dear lady, would like to have a glass of wine or beer with his dinner, let him have it in your sweet and wholesome presence. Don't make a hypocrite of him. Don't compel him to go and hide himself in his club or, worse, in a saloon, or, worse still, don't allow him to go and lose his manhood's dignity by crawling on all fours under the counter of a drug-store.

There is no virtue in compulsion. There is virtue only in liberty.

Ah! how I remember admiring, in the hot days of blue-ribbonism in England, that free Briton I once met who had a yellow ribbon in his button hole.

"What's that you have on?" I said to him.

"That's a yellow ribbon," he replied. "I belong to the yellow ribbon army."

"Ah, and what is it the yellow-ribbon army do?" I inquired.

"What do we do?" he said, "Why, we eat what we likes, we drink what we likes and we don't care a —— for nobody."

There are well-meaning, most highly estimable and talented ladies who go about the world preaching temperance, that is to say, total abstinence, not moderation.

Now, as a rule, these ladies have special reasons for so doing. Very often they have led a life of sorrow and misery with wretched husbands, and they should be pitied. But hundreds of thousands of women have good husbands who have not to be cured of habits which they never in their lives indulged in, and

who would be condemned to deny themselves every little luxury that helps make life cheerful when used with moderation and discretion, if the preachings of these often [unfortunate ladies were to take the shape of laws.

I have often had to listen to self-confessed, reformed drunkards who preached to me who never was once drunk in my life. The thing is ludicrous.

There exist, among the Anglo-Saxons, people to whom the strains of Wagner and Beethoven's music say absolutely nothing, to whom the Venus of Milo is indecent. They declare music and the fine arts immoral, and if they had their way, they would close the concert halls and the museums on every day of the week. Because their minds are distorted, foul and even dirty, they would condemn people with lofty and artistic minds to never hear a masterpiece of music or behold a masterpiece of painting or statuary. I have met people who declared they would never again set foot inside the walls of the Louvre and of the British Museum. And if the Anglo-Saxon fanatics, those arch enemies of art, make a little more progress, the future of that great Institution, the British Institution, is not safe.

As everybody knows, there exist, in Great Britain and in America, thousands of people who declare the stage to be a most wicked and immoral institution. I have on the subject a rather pleasant reminiscence which illustrates how the Anglo-Saxons can combine the spirit of morality with the spirit of business. I once gave a lecture, in a town of some twenty thousand inhabitants in the State of Kansas, under the auspices of a society of lady reformers. They had engaged the Opera House for the occasion. I arrived at the theatre a few minutes after eight. The ladies in charge were in the ticket-office pocketing money as fast as they could. To my great gratification there was an immense house, which was due, no doubt, far more to the popularity of the ladies' philanthropic cause than to my own modest personality. When the crowd was in and seated, I asked to be led to the stage, and I said to the lady president of the society: "I suppose you have your seats reserved." "No," she replied, "I have not. I don't think I will go in, if you will excuse me. I am proud to say that I have never once in my life set foot inside a theatre." I literally collapsed. There were in that theatre some twelve hun-

dred people whom these good ladies had induced to "sin" to fill the coffers of their society.

All these movements, headed by women, are in the wrong direction. They interfere with the liberties of a great people, and punish thousands and thousands of good, orderly, well-behaved people, to reach a score or two of bad ones, whom they often fail to reach and oftener still fail to cure. I repeat it, there are many hundreds of good people in this world for a very few hundreds of bad ones. The laws should aim at reaching the former and protecting them. This world is considerably better than the fanatics of all denominations and superstitions would make us believe. For eleven years, I have travelled all over the world, and I have never met any but honorable people to deal with. For instance, I have given 1,272 lectures in my life, and only once did I come across a man who behaved dishonestly toward me. He ran away with the cash while I was speaking; but then it was on Sunday and some good pious people said to me that God, in his wisdom, had punished me for my wickedness. I must say that I never could see very clearly why God, in his wisdom, should have allowed the thief to safely run away with the money; but the ways of Providence are impenetrable, and its decrees should not be discussed. I might add that the lecture was more of a harmless address—almost a little sermon on the duty of Cheerfulness; but two or three times it caused the audience to smile, and this is simply too awful to think of.

Yes, the world is good, very good, in spite of the calumnies that are constantly hurled at its face by the Pharisees of Anglo-Saxondom. Yes, full of good men, crammed with good women, and the excellent ladies of the Philanthropic societies of America should take it for granted that there are many, many good and virtuous people besides themselves.

You don't cut down an apple tree because there are two or three bad apples on it. You cut down the two or three bad apples, and all your efforts tend to see that the hundreds of good ones are made healthy, happy, and comfortable.

I have no hesitation in declaring, after five visits to this great and most hospitable country, that the American women of good society are probably the most intelligent, bright, and brilliant, and certainly the best educated and the most interesting, women in the world.

But when I see what some American women can do in public life, outside of the beautiful sphere in which they were intended to reign supreme, I feel ready to appreciate and echo the remark that Frederick the Great was wont to make when he met a woman alone in the streets of Berlin :

“What are you doing here? Go home and look after your house and your children.”

MAX O'RELL.

II.

I HAVE sat silent at my table and heard foreign guests discuss, in a sweet way they have, the unpleasant points of American character, feeling that the obligations of hospitality and of good manners forbade reproof. But when we are put to open shame in print, the situation is somewhat changed. Still, it would be scarcely worth while to attempt answering the thin tissue of wrong conclusions found in Mr. Max O'Rell's witty, if rather incoherent, little article, if it were not—we will not say, for the old adage that a certain ugly thing can go round the world while the truth is drawing on its boots—but for the fact that his good-natured epigram may impress the superficial reader more strongly than it warrants.

In the first paragraph of this little chat of his, Mr. O'Rell assumes the incorrect postulate that the women of this country wish to govern. He mistakes ; they wish only the liberty to govern themselves and their own interests. He then makes the extraordinary assertion that wherever women have had the chance to govern they have developed a tyranny. Is it then possible that where men govern tyranny is unknown? The women who are cited in chief support of the statement governed a single year, it appears ; but for how many thousands of years have not men governed, with perpetual revolt against their tyranny? And are there not still some tolerably despotic examples extant?

In continuing this line of remark our excursive visitor takes occasion to declare that it is the *raison d'être* of a woman to be a mother ; but he forgets to state that then also it is the *raison d'être* of a man to be a father ; which clears the equation of both members and leaves room for the development of the other affairs of life, perhaps opens the way for surprise that a woman

who is petted and "literally covered with precious stones," should not be entirely satisfied, should not rest content as Fido with his gold collar, his silk cushion, his dish of cream, but should still see some errors to be corrected, and should try to make the way easier for those who are not petted and covered with precious stones. Woman, Mr. O'Rell further says, has a grievance against nature, "which made her different from man." The conceit of it! Ah, and the civility of it!

But really it is Mr. O'Rell himself who has a grievance. And his grievance seems to be that it is difficult in some parts of this country to obtain wine and beer at open tables, which he lays to the account of the exertions of some women and not at all to those of any men. And this reveals the *raison d'être* of his article, which—partly veiled by the slight rankle of an old hostility to the Anglo-Saxon, and by persiflage concerning women, who in one breath are called restless, bumptious, ugly, and dissatisfied, and, in another, bright, interesting, and the superiors of their husbands "in education and in almost every respect,"—is really that of a temperance tract.

Owing to the circumstance that, whether wisely or unwisely, certain women are interested in affairs public if petty, and in addition think it of less moment that he should walk a mile to make his purchase than that a whole generation of boys should be hindered in growth and stupefied in brain, Mr. O'Rell opens on them the vials of his merry wrath, and announces that they all belong to the lower middle class. As one reads, one remembers the exclamation of the young woman to another swift traveller, "What very poor letters of introduction you must have brought!" But it is a gratuitous assumption on the visitor's part. For the first principles of this government make a lower middle class here an impossibility. We do not recognize such a thing. Our government stands upon the will of the mass of the people. Education is within the reach of all. Those who have much property are unlikely to have an education superior to that of those who have little; and we have no other rank than that of education and morality. This is our theory, and we consider anything else unsound, ignoble, and unchristian. Owing to the absence of rights of primogeniture among us, money is too fluctuating an element to succeed in making and perpetuating classes. And although there must always be individual differences and

preferences, yet our women, active in public ways, are as well born and as well bred as those who are not active, and the men who accompany them are their mates in parentage, discretion, and culture.

It is "a sort of principle," Mr. O'Rell says, that the temperance women and the teetotalers are not to be found in refined society. Such a statement shows the folly of accepting evidence on hearsay, of judging from scattered instances, of taking short tours through an immense empire and supposing one's self, however brilliant and kindly and observing—and in candor Mr. O'Rell is all this—able to become sufficiently acquainted with the varieties of type, to generalize from them and arrive at correct results. Mr. O'Rell may return and say without contradiction to his own country-people whatever he chooses, but he should not say to Americans, who know better, that the woman interested in affairs here is fanatic, sour, sallow, thin, wrinkled, unmarried or disappointed in marriage; or that the woman with her children's arms about her neck finds no incentive to improve the world before they shall go out into it, and to help remove the pitfalls where others have already fallen by the way.

In truth no more complete misstatement could be made than that involved in this "sort of principle." Frances Willard, as attractive now, when she is the "uncrowned queen" of a million followers, as when she was a blooming girl, is the welcome guest of drawing-rooms where the most delicate and cultivated women are proud and glad to meet her. And there is certainly no woman in the world commanding more refined society than Lady Henry Somerset, the daughter of a hundred earls, few lovelier in person and in nature, as earnest in the temperance movement here as in the other Anglo-Saxon stronghold. I mention these prominent names to avoid enumeration of others almost as well known.

Mr. O'Rell is behind the age in America. Time was when "the long-haired man and the short-haired woman" were pierced by the arrows of the scornful; but they set on foot and accomplished the greatest reform ever wrought in the history of humanity. Now they, and the fashion of them, have gone by. And it is not necessary to tell those that meet them every day, on the street, in the office, the shop, the college, the hospital, the settlement house, that the greater part of the

women who are now taking their place as equal factors of life, of civilization, and of the welfare of the world, are young, well groomed, dressed in the best modes Paris sends us, neglecting none of the duties and none of the delicacies of manners and of living, agreeable, often beautiful, often married, with happy homes perfectly kept, with tender husbands of a nobler sort than they who hold a woman as their plaything and personal property, with dear children whose rosy health attests their care and whose future is their chief concern ; when unmarried, remaining single for the same good reason that many men give—because they choose to do so ; and, when by chance no longer young, as beautiful and as fine as Mrs. Julia Ward Howe herself. Such women can well afford to dispense with the admiration of one who declares, “ Ah ! how I remember admiring ” the man who said, “ We drink what we likes, and we don’t care a — for nobody ! ” And such women will decline to accept the smooth and pretty veneer of flattery with which Mr. O’Reil announces that the “ American women of good society are probably the most intelligent, bright, and brilliant, and certainly the best educated and the most interesting, women in the world.” For they know that there are women of other races all their equals, that the English woman is as well educated, that there is none more interesting than the polished Italian, the Spanish, the German, the Russian, and nowhere any more brilliant than the French woman, after whose sparkle they labor in vain.

H. P. SPOFFORD.

III.

THE request to comment upon Mr. O’Reil’s article came to me immediately upon my return from a trip to the Orient ; and the women of the East in all their degradation stood before my eyes. I seemed again to see their covered faces. In some instances one can distinguish those of them who are married from those who are unmarried, for the former are all in black. It seemed to be very appropriate that these should be dressed in mourning. They were mere beasts of burden ; of not as much worth as the donkeys their husbands rode, while *they* walked ! The piercing cry of a Mohammedan mother, as she saw her baby carried to the burial, sounded still in my ears. Her husband and

all the men could enter the mosque, but she must remain without ! And I cannot rid myself of the impression that the position of the Western woman will in some way in the future affect the position of her Eastern sisters. The light that comes to us Western women may some day dispel their darkness.

If all that Mr. O'Rell says of the American woman is true, I do not wonder at her unrest. "Petted by her husband, the most devoted and hard-working of husbands in the world, she is literally covered with precious stones. She is the superior of her husband in education and almost in every respect. She is surrounded by the most numerous and delicate attentions, yet she is not satisfied." If she were satisfied, she would be fit only for a harem. The "not being satisfied," of which the writer complains in the Western woman, only proves to my mind that she has a soul. She cares for the less-favored women who are not adorned or covered with jewels. As I write, the face of one of the richest young women of this country comes up before me. We were driving over a part of her great estate and talking on this very subject. I was conservative and spoke of my fears. Her look more than her words told me she was taking in a wider view than I had yet seen. She said : "If such great responsibilities had not been laid on me, I might not feel as I do, but I must act on my deepest convictions." As I think of her face, how I rejoice that it is not with her as with the women of the East who are covered with jewels, who look out of windows so arranged that they can see the great world without being seen by it, or being permitted to influence it ! Ah ! in the latter part of this nineteenth century, here in the United States, and in Great Britain, covering a woman with precious stones does not answer her nobler needs. She must work to make this world holier. To receive from God and to give out to one's fellows is the only way in which women as well as men can be made happy.

As to the happy wife and mother we are told to look at this picture : "See her lips bearing the imprints of holy kisses, and her neck the marks of the little children's arms." I know women too well to believe that the babies will be neglected, and I know all about the little arms around a mother's neck. But is a mother's interest in what concerns her children to end with their nursery days ? Any problem that touches the home concerns her, and it is her duty to take personal interest in it.

And that fact alone justifies women in making their influence felt either in public or private, when the safeguards of home are in danger. And as to those who do enter public life because of their interest in other questions, all I can say is that such of the women who are advocating the cause of suffrage as I personally know, are among the noblest women I have ever met, and there is in them none of the spirit of domination of which the author of "Petticoat Government" complains. They want to help right the wrongs; they want to help in the interest of good government as far as in them lies; for it would seem that those who do not wear petticoats have not yet succeeded in lifting this world into all the light and joy that are needed. It would be too much to hope that all women will be wise; but all men are not wise, or, if they are, it took time to make them so. I wish men could disabuse themselves of the idea that women want to be men. Nothing can ever make a woman aught but a woman, and not many will enter into public life. But I believe that the ideals before those who do enter that life are quite as high as those cherished by their husbands and brothers.

Mr. O'Rell tells us that the new woman is not to be found outside of Great Britain and the United States. So much the worse, then, for other countries! I wish I might have seen some evidence of the new woman in the East! For, let us remember, the real (not the sham) new woman is never a made-up woman. There is nothing unwomanly about her. What we need is more new women; as, just as surely, we need more new men!

Mr. O'Rell says he appreciates and echoes the sentiment of Frederick the Great, who was wont to say when he met a woman alone in the streets of Berlin: "What are you doing here? Go home and look after your house and children." I wonder what Frederick would have said to the thousands of men in clubs who leave their wives at home. Would it have been: "What are you doing here? *Go home to your wives and children.*"

I am making no plea specially for woman suffrage; there may be easily two opinions about that. I do believe, however, that what, as a girl of fifteen, I heard Lucy Stone say, is true: "What a woman can do well, she has a right to do." And what these things are she needs to be told; and she should be encouraged in the doing of them.

MARGARET BOTTOME.